

**A PRELIMINARY NOTE ON A COMPARISON
OF BELMONT RED AND BONSMARA CATTLE IN THE
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

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INTRODUCTION

Importation of the Bonsmara breed of cattle has been recommended by the Animal Production Committee, (Anon. 1979) and supported by many Australian beef producers who have visited the Republic of South Africa (RSA) and been impressed by the breed. The Belmont Red's origin in many ways parallels that of the Bonsmara. Both breeds are by-products of research breeding programs, are based on the Africander, Hereford and Shorthorn breeds, and have firmly embraced objective selection. In an international cooperative trial, performance data on the two breeds is being collected in a range of environments in RSA to establish whether they differ sufficiently to warrant the importation of the Bonsmara.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

During 1980, semen from six 18 month old Belmont Red bulls from the CSIRO Belmont herd was sent to the Animal and Dairy Research Institute, RSA. A second consignment of a wider sample of Belmont and industry bulls has been despatched this year for the second phase of the project. Bonsmara semen came from sires of the State herd and industry herds. Semen from the two breeds was used in five crossbred herds in four locations chosen to represent semi-arid (Northern Cape), sub-humid (Bush veld), humid (Low veld) and cool (High veld) climates. Nutritional level and disease and parasite loads vary considerably between locations. Matings of the original sires were made over three years.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To date only birth and weaning weights have been received from the Bush veld, Low veld and High veld and preliminary analyses of these data has been carried out. The least squares means of weights from two calf drops are given in Table 1. Herd-year means for birth weight ranged from 34.6 to 39.6 kg and for weaning weight from 194 to 227 kg. The breed effect and breed x herd-year interaction were not significant indicating that the growth rate of the two breeds was similar in the different environments. In these analyses, sire x herd-year interactions were not significant. Further data on post-weaning growth, carcass characteristics and reproduction is awaited.

Table 1 : Least squares means for birth and weaning weights of Bonsmara and Belmont Red sired progeny

Sire Breed	No. of animals	Birth weight (kg)	200 day weaning weight (kg)
Bonsmara	251	37.1	212
Belmont Red	148	37.9	210

It has generally been assumed by industry, and often by scientists that the genetic base of Australia's beef cattle population is small, and that importation of new genetic material will invariably be beneficial. Australia has therefore been an importer, at great expense, of generally untested beef cattle genotypes and sires, with in most instances the only real beneficiaries being the entrepreneurs.

This relatively inexpensive trial demonstrates that valid breed and sire evaluations can be of great value to the industries of potential exporting and importing countries. The application of this model for the evaluation of other genotypes in Africa is currently being investigated.

REFERENCES

Anon (1979). Standing Committee in Agriculture, Technical Report Series, No. 3.